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ALISON PRYER

little red suitcase (for Mum)

faded to deep peony from the original rose,
but ever small and elegant
as would become any young lady
who traveled in the cool days of Frank and Ella,
wearing white gloves like Grace and
a knotted silk square like Audrey.

once a vessel of my mother's dreams,
now even the sun-dusted snaps of holidays
in Italy and Spain are gone.
my mother too.
the case is packed, but it's not going anywhere —
all done with running, a keeper of memories.

inside, slender ribbons embrace
a nest of white treasure: handmade lace and drawn
threadwork
pillowcases scented with lavender water for sleeping
beauties;
Grandma's round Christmas tablecloth,
reindeer cross-stitched in cranberry wool,
forever running in circles;

the great-great-aunts' full-length evening gloves,
calfskin all shrunken like Mum's girlhood hopes
of learning French and going to the opera;
my sister's flyaway fairy costume, gauze wings hanging
limp,
long bereft of the twirling toddler
who granted three wishes with mere wave of dimpled hand.

this little suitcase has seen its share of rainy days,
watermarked satin interior graced with sepia stains
like the aging face of a pale carnation.
diesel fumes and raindrops clung to its skin
the morning my mother and sister fled
on a train with doors that opened outward

all the way south and into another country.
Mum wrapped her dead dreams in petals,
abandoning the sand-washed cottage and —
temple of her heart — her June garden.
silent refugee of my father's rages, she lived for a time
like a hermit crab out of this tearstained shell.

Alison Pryer, Ph.D. has taught in Germany, Japan, Egypt, and Canada. Her work has appeared in numerous North American and international academic and literary journals.